

WYCOMBE Wanderers came within an ace of sur-rendering three Rothmans Isthmian League points on Tuesday night when they almost let a 4-0 lead slip from their grasp against Hayes.

As it was, they managed to cling on to a 4-3 victory by the skin of their teeth in a match that was riddled with errors, basic mistakes accounting for four of the goals.

After 45 minutes the match looked as good as won for Wycombe and most people were licking their lips in anticipation of the £40 awarded by the sponsors for a three clear goal victory. Little did they know of what was in store for the remainder of the game!

Wycombe went ahead after only five minutes with a deflected goal by full back Derek Gamblin. A long ball from Pritchard was met by Searle who slipped a pass out to Gamblin, overlapping. Derek's original cross was blocked but he hammered in the rebound, the ball striking centre back Bobby Hatt and arching over 'keeper Ian Bath.

BEST YET

The early breakthrough was the signal for some of Wycombe's best football to date. Hayes had no answer to the pace and accuracy of the attacking moves and were all but overwhelmed. Chances were carved out regularly. Like in the 14th minute when only a brave stop by Graham Thomas thwarted the ever-improving Mick Holfield.

Holfield, scorer of one of last Saturday's goals at Ilford, was not to be denied however. In the 21st minute 'keeper Bath, who had a nightmare first half, called for the ball inside the area but mistimed his attempt to fist clear. The ball struck his body and rolled out as far as Holfield, who thumped home the second goal with real confidence.

Hayes replied with searching crosses into the Wycombe box, but John Maskell's handling throughout the first half was faultless. In the 37th minute, Tony Horsemans

netting with a superb volley, Wanderers notched the fourth goal.

It came after 63 minutes and brought a booking for the Hayes skipper and former Wanderer

come up against serious pressure so far this season. This was now to be the test — and they failed badly.

The two centre backs — Dave Bullock and Phil Wood — so

By STUART EARP; Wycombe Wanderers 4, Hayes 3

somehow managed to beat the Hayes offside trap and found himself some ten yards clear of the defence. Bath tried to hack the ball clear outside the penalty box but miskicked. He had forced Horsemans into a narrow angle, however, and Bodger's shot rolled past the post and into the side netting.

Two minutes later, however, the Wycombe veteran was presented with a similar opportunity — and this time he made no mistake. Once again Bath raced out of his area to try and clear a long through ball. Searle, challenging well, blocked the clearance and it rolled nicely for Horsemans, 20 yards out, to gently curl the ball between two defenders and into a gaping net.

The Wycombe domination continued into the second half and after Searle had struck the side

Bobby Hatt. Hayes, always too square at the back, were well and truly caught by Bullock's superb crossfield pass to Pritchard. Larry raced on and although Bath managed to parry his first shot, Pritchard hammered in the second only for Hatt to fist the ball over the bar with a glorious save. Referee Knock was unimpressed, however. He promptly booked the player for hands and awarded a penalty. Horsemans slotted home his second spot-kick in two matches.

It was at this stage that the fortunes of the game changed dramatically.

Hayes somehow raised their game out of all proportions, making that extra effort and with nothing to lose, playing a far more attacking game.

The Wycombe defence, the Oxford game apart, has not

dominant in the first half, lost all their authority as did the midfield men, who were outthought throughout the last 25 minutes. Goalkeeper Maskell, after looking unbeatable, was responsible for two of the Hayes goals to follow.

The incredible Hayes recovery began in the 63rd minute. After two successive corners, Roger Grant headed Hatt's shot off the line, with Maskell beaten. From the third flag kick the 'keeper failed to gather cleanly and after a scramble, Graham Thomas hooked the ball home.

Ten minutes later Maskell fumbled another corner and Drabwell had a simple task in scoring. The Hayes player, however, was injured in scoring the goal and suffered a bad cut across the eyebrow. He was

stretched off and taken to hospital. Substitute Bathford moved into defence while Hatt joined the front runners.

Hayes, now sensing they were in with a real chance of saving the game, played like men possessed while Wycombe, unable to slow the game down to their own pace, were panicked into errors. In the 84th minute Tony Roberts crossed into the penalty area where Bullock used his arm to control the ball. Referee Knock immediately awarded the penalty which Roberts put home with ease.

Bullock, incidentally was not booked for handling, although by the referee's decision to give a penalty, the centre half's action must have been deliberate. No doubt Bobby Hatt felt some aggrieved.

Dave Woodbridge replaced Horsemans with five minutes left as Hayes went all out for an equaliser. Maskell, with some excuse for his errors as he had dislocated his thumb in training, produced a great save from Hatt in injury time, diving to hold the big man's powerful header. Seconds later at the other end, Searle almost sewed the game up when he sprinted through only for Bath to block his shot, spreading himself full length.

The sighs of relief were distinctly audible when the referee brought the match to a close. Wycombe will certainly bring back the crowds with football and results like Tuesday night, but without a doubt there is a lot of work to be done with the team yet.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell, D. Gamblin, P. Wood, D. Bullock, R. Grant, L. Pritchard, R. Williams, M. Holfield, A. Horsemans (sub D. Woodbridge 85 mins), K. Searle, S. Perrin.

HAYES: I. Bath, K. Kent, R. Hatt, G. Thomas, M. Bell, L. Hartridge, A. Tottman, P. Drabwell (sub C. Bathford 77 mins), T. Brown, T. Roberts, J. Wilks.

Referee: P. Knock (Reading).

Half-time: 3-0. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Gamblin (5), Holfield (21), Horsemans 2 (1 pen) (39), (63); Hayes — Thomas (27), Drabwell (75), Roberts (pen) (84).

Official paying attendance: 1,585. **Approximate attendance:** 1,900.

CHANGES AHEAD?

WYCOMBE WANDERERS, unbeaten in the Rothmans Isthmian League this season, take on Barking at Loakes Park tomorrow (Saturday) knowing that the Essex side have lost both their league matches this season by a 3-0 margin.

Wanderers themselves have missed out on the £40 bonus, for winning by three clear goals, twice this season, winning 3-1 at Ilford and then wasting a 4-0 lead at home to Hayes on Tuesday night. They have a great chance for their first cash payment from Rothmans, tomorrow.

Barking's two defeats have both been away from home at Hayes and Enfield and they will continue to play away until their new ground is completed. It is situated about two miles from last year's Vicarage Road ground.

They hope to include three new signings tomorrow — goalkeeper Brian Blake, Dave Waite and John Pulter. Blake has played for British Universities. With the average age of the side at 20-21 the accent is definitely on youth and their inexperience has been exposed in both matches to date.

After Tuesday night's performance, Wycombe manager Brian Lee seems likely to make changes in defence. The centre half spot is still in the balance with Dave Bullock and Peter Anderson in contention. Phil Wood may drop out after a suspect performance against Hayes.

Tony Brothers could return if his blistered feet have recovered while Dave Woodbridge is also playing well enough for a full first team game. Wanderers also could have problems in goal where John Maskell played on Tuesday with a dislocated thumb. At present there is no other 'keeper in the squad.